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## EVALUATION OF ANNUAL COMPULSORY PRE - PRIMARY EDUCATION IN CHILDREN FROM SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

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### ABSTRACT

In the article we want to evaluate whether one year of compulsory pre-primary education is enough to acquire sufficient knowledge, skills and abilities for the child to successfully manage the beginning of basic education. Here are two surveys we conducted at the beginning and end of the school year in the same children. In the end, we evaluate the results and recommend suggestions for practice.

**KEYWORDS:** compulsory pre - primary education, child, socially disadvantaged environment

### INTRODUCTION

From September 1, 2021, all children who reached the age of 5 by August 31, 2021, began to fulfill compulsory pre-primary education - that is, they were obliged to attend kindergarten daily and regularly to prepare sufficiently for primary school in one school year. Kindergarten teachers contacted us to find out what skills and knowledge children already have and what are the biggest shortcomings that need to be developed during the school year.

**Materials and methods:** At the beginning of the school year, we did a screening examination of children in selected areas. We used a dedicated testing tool. We monitored speech and communication skills, motor skills, the level of basic knowledge, right-wing orientation, mathematical skills, self-service activities. We performed a screening examination in two kindergartens, which are attended only by children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. We tested 57 children together.

### The results:

#### 1. Speech and communication skills:

*September:* At the beginning of the school year, the children had very little or no vocabulary in the written language, they only communicated in the Romani language, even with only one word, a short sentence. Instructions and instructions had to be interpreted into the Romani language. Speech was disrupted in all language levels; regular speech therapy was essential.

*May:* We observed a significant improvement in communication - they were able to say hello, name



the body parts, fruits, animals, colors, numbers, we knew a lot of songs, rhymes, the overall level of speech improved even in terms of pronunciation. However, not all children have achieved such success and improvement. We observed this only in those children who attended kindergarten regularly and almost daily. However, there were very few children. COVID-19 also contributed to this, the parents did not send their children to school so that they would not become infected, or they themselves suffered from this disease and were quarantined. However, they did not enter kindergarten after the quarantine was completed.

## **2. Motor:**

*September:* The children had no habits to know how to hold a pencil, crayon, marker. Some had a pencil in their hands for the first time. They were also clumsy, they had trouble walking, running, jumping, they couldn't keep their balance.

*May:* We found a slight improvement in the grip of the pencil, with pressure on the pad. The level of drawing, writing simple preparation lines and shapes also improved, the pressure on the pad was still strong. Children's gross motor skills have also improved slightly, but they still need to exercise and train their motor memory.

## **3. Basic knowledge:**

*September:* At the beginning of the year, the children had very little knowledge. They did not know their name at all, nor how old were they. They did not know parts of the body, they did not distinguish animals, they did not know fruits, vegetables, they could not name things of everyday use. They did not have the basic skills that many children already know at the age of 3.

*May:* We have to say that they have learned a lot. Everyone knew their name and age. They could show the basic parts of the body. They knew how to name their clothes. According to the pictures, they recognized domestic and forest animals, they knew their names, as well as the sounds they made. They could teach what fruits and vegetables were, some they had in the garden, some their parents bought them. They learned to name classroom equipment, toys. They learned the basic rules of conduct. They use words please, thank you, sorry. They can ask for a toy, a pen, a drawing, crayons.

They learned to use scissors and cut a thin piece of paper, a string. They learned to glue, paint, draw. They mastered simple dances, songs, movement games, children's theaters. They can play puppet show without the help of a teacher. They understand the basic instructions and instructions and no longer require interpretation into the Romani language. They are interested in school work, they get acquainted with the Slovak alphabet. They will endure the task of starting and finishing, maintaining attention and concentration. These are important skills that are needed to successfully start basic first grade education.



#### **4. Right orientation:**

*September:* Neither child had the right and left side mastered. We could only identify the dominant hand, or the one the child just preferred. They could not be instructed to show any hand, leg, eye, ear. They also had difficulty going up and down. They did not respond to these instructions in the Romani language either.

*May:* We found improvement in this area, the children learned to recognize the right and left side, they learned to orientate in the area, they knew how to point up and down. However, they were still uncertain during the game and rehearsals, they were wrong about the instructions. This area needs to be trained for a very long time.

#### **5. Mathematical skills:**

*September:* At the beginning of the year, the children had no math skills. They did not know the term number, they could not count the number series, they could not show the number of fingers, they could not choose the number of objects according to the instruction.

*May:* The results surprised us. In a year, the children managed to count to 5 without errors, they could show the number correctly on their fingers, they could choose the number of objects according to the instructions. Some even knew the numbers. They learned to distinguish and name basic geometric shapes. They learned to determine more, less, and equally in opinion.

#### **6. Self-service activities:**

*September:* At the beginning of the school year, the children did not have any hygiene habits, did not know how to use the toilet, release tap water, use soap, towel, comb, change, dress separately, put on shoes, zip up, lace up shoes. Overall, they were independent.

*May:* Hygiene levels have improved. The children learned to wash regularly on arrival at kindergarten, before and after meals, after using the toilet, after a walk, after class activity. They can comb their hair, put on their shoes, fasten buttons, zipper, and even handle laces. They learned to use cutlery, a spoon, a knife and a fork, they could also drink from a glass, from a bottle. They knew how to change into their pajamas and put their things together on a chair. Self-service is an important factor when starting primary school.

**Discussion:** Within the individual areas, we described the state of knowledge and skills at the beginning of compulsory pre-primary education and the state after nine months of education in kindergarten. We have to state that only 10 students could say with certainty that they are school-qualified and can enter the first year of primary school without difficulty. We couldn't do it with other children. Most of the children were unprepared for school. We investigated where the causes of such differences were, when the teachers' approach was the same for all children.



The main reason was attending school. More successful children went to kindergarten from the age of 3. They learned what they needed to know in primary school during three years of regular schooling. We noticed this in the first questions of our research. They had a good command of literary language, they already had basic knowledge and skills, they were always interested in new things.

Children who came to school for the first time for one year had great difficulties with social adaptation, kept crying, refusing to leave their parents, not responding to toys, fairy tales, interesting exercises and games. They did not speak the standard language at all, nor did they respond to instructions in Romani. They didn't come to school after the first day. Parents were not interested in the content of education, they did not ask what the child should teach at home in order to go to school ready. They fought about the child's illness, the lack of clothes, the shopping for shoes. There was even advice when the COVID-19 epidemic spread so that they would not have to go to kindergarten. Parents did not even respond to the calls of teachers, social workers, field social workers and community workers. A family visit didn't help either. Teachers' efforts to improve children's knowledge and skills were unaccepted. However, the question is: How can such a unprepared child cope with the demanding requirements of primary school?

The Education Act in force in the Slovak Republic allows for the continuation of compulsory pre-primary education, or to place a child in the preparatory year at primary school, if the child is expected to fail the primary school curriculum. It is a good step for all unprepared children. They have a chance to learn all the necessary knowledge, skills and habits, to develop auditory and visual differentiation, motor skills and, most importantly, to learn speech and to develop the communication skills that are necessary to understand instructions. Parents should be encouraged to realize that regular school attendance is essential for children to be successful in school and not have to be transferred to special primary schools for children with disabilities.

After the first examination, we suggested a number of recommendations to pedagogical staff on how to work with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Application of special educational procedures:**

- The teacher takes into account the special educational needs of children by proceeding in such a way as to alleviate the educational shortcomings that result from them, e.g. developing children's individual abilities and preconditions so that they acquire the knowledge, skills and habits they will use in their personal lives, focusing on areas where the child could succeed, developing children 's limited functions, skills and abilities, applying special teaching methods, special



pedagogical procedures, the use of therapeutic techniques or their elements and the use of special teaching and compensatory aids.

- It applies an individual approach to children, differentiates tasks and activities with regard to different educational abilities and skills of children.
- Respects the individual learning and working pace of children.
- It effectively uses compensatory and special teaching aids and enables children to work with them according to the recommendations of educational counseling and prevention facilities.
- The school special pedagogue, resp. Teacher's assistant.
- The teacher creates and promotes a positive and favorable atmosphere in the classroom by respecting the personality of the children, expresses positive expectations in fulfilling tasks, responds encouragingly, supports their self-confidence, accepts students' right to make mistakes, does not use derogatory expressions, comments and leads students to tolerance.
- Develops the cognitive competencies of students with special educational needs by making knowledge available in an understandable way with an emphasis on creating basic concepts, correct ideas, procedures, practical activities.
- The teacher asks questions that stimulate interest, curiosity of students, assigns tasks for active perception, concentration of attention, understanding.
- Assigns tasks for the application according to the abilities, possibilities and assumptions of children.
- The teacher develops students' competences for lifelong learning by using continuous assessment verbally, motivationally, praising students for their efforts, appreciating their progress in learning also with regard to previous performance.
- The teacher adequately develops children's work habits and skills.
- Creates opportunities to present students' attitudes, opinions and experiences.
- It also assigns tasks requiring mutual cooperation and help from students, applies cooperative teaching, thereby developing children's social competencies.
- When creating a school educational program, the teacher emphasizes the concretization and specification of the focus of the kindergarten in relation to their own conditions, opportunities, specific staffing and traditions of kindergarten.
- The starting points for planning educational activities include, in particular, defining the specifics of the environment from which kindergarten children come and expressing their current abilities.

**Aids for children and pupils from the CAP:**

- Demonstration aids
- daily necessities (real objects or models)



- aids for the development of speech, thinking and other mental functions (pictures, literature, magazines, computer programs, ...)
- tools for the development of perception, attention, memory and will
- tools for the development of fine motor skills
- about motivational aids
- all other special aids intended for students with SEN.

**Specific methods and forms of education:**

- A program to develop speech, thinking, and other mental functions
- didactic games for the development of the child's / pupil's personality and his cognition
- social adaptation
- about the so-called open teaching (content and methods are determined by the interest and abilities of individuals)
- Assignment of tasks matching the student's most advanced skills (motivation)
- for tutoring among students
- for cooperative teaching

**Provision of professional services:** regular interventions - school special pedagogue; developing impaired functions; educator specifically prepared for the education of children from the CAP, psychologist, speech therapist, therapist, teacher's assistant and other professionals.

**CONCLUSION:** In the article we pointed out the first experiences and results with compulsory pre-primary education in the Slovak Republic. It is good that the obligation to attend kindergarten before entering primary school has been allowed, but experience has shown that it is a very short time for children to learn everything they need to know in the first grade within one year and with careless attendance. The basis is language - its lack of mastery is the first prerequisite for failure in school. It is essential that children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds attend kindergarten from the age of 3 and regularly. It is enough time to acquire basic abilities, skills and habits, the necessary knowledge and to be successful in life.

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